

HOWARD HARVEY HITCHCOCK

THE WATUMULL FOUNDATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Howard Harvey Hitchcock

(1899 -)

Mr. Hitchcock, who was born in Honolulu, is a fourth generation descendant of two prominent missionary families: the Gerrit Parmele Judds on his mother's side and the Harvey Rexford Hitchcocks on his father's side. He is the son of David Howard Hitchcock II, internationally known artist during his lifetime, and Hester Judd Dickson Hitchcock.

He graduated from Punahou School and Cornell University and was employed by the Hawaiian Dredging Company and Dillingham Corporation from 1922 until his retirement in 1964. From 1948 to 1964, he was chief cost engineer of Dillingham Corporation.

Mr. Hitchcock married Florence Margaret Campbell of Hilo on February 25, 1922 and they had one daughter, Helen Hester Hitchcock (Mrs. Verlin E.) Mattox.

In this interview, Mr. Hitchcock discusses his father's career as an artist, his own interest in art and conchology, and his family background. He also relates several anecdotes about his famous father.

Lynda Mair, Interviewer

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2051 Young Street, Honolulu, Hawaii 96826

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INTERVIEW WITH HOWARD HARVEY HITCHCOCK

At his Pohai Nani apartment, 45-090 Namoku Street, Kaneohe 96744
November 1, 1971

H: Howard Harvey Hitchcock

M: Lynda Mair, Interviewer

M: Can you give me your parents' names and your grandparents' names. (first of the month Civilian Defense siren sounds)
Let's see, the original ones that came would be your great-grandparents, right?

H: Yeh. (long pause until the siren stops) My, it doesn't get much use.

He [Harvey Rexford Hitchcock, his great-grandfather] came over in 1824 [May 17, 1832] and he was the first missionary on the Island of Molokai and he established a church over there. He married his wife [Rebecca Howard] aboard ship in so-called Honolulu Harbor when she came out here to meet him. [They were married on August 26, 1831 in Owasco, New York.]

Then there were two generations after him of which my father was the third--the third generation--and my father [David Howard Hitchcock, II] married Hester Judd Dickson. Her mother was originally a Judd, so that's how I have the connection with the Judd family.

M: I see. So your father's name was . . .

H: David Howard Hitchcock.

M: This is your father.

H: Yes.

M: And he's named after the original Hitchcock that came out.

H: Yes. He was called Howard, though, because his father was called David. And my name is Howard Harvey and I'm called Harvey because my father was called Howard. (laughter)
Most of us are called by our second names.

M: Uh huh. Where were you born?

H: I was born in Honolulu.

M: Was your father in business here?

H: My father was an artist. He was an internationally known artist. This is what few I have of his work up here on this wall.

M: Oh really? Oh, I've heard of the Hitchcock, the artist.

H: I'm restoring another one of his there now. (loud traffic noises) Those in back of that "Sunrise on Mauna Kea" there are mine. All the rest that you see here are mine. But that was his vocation. He made his living painting and selling pictures.

M: Were they mostly of local scenes?

H: No, he painted in Paris and in Europe and all over the Mainland, but he lived here and so forth. He studied originally in Paris. But all his record is in Men and Women of Hawaii, as mine is.

M: Did you travel with your father when he went?

H: Well, he took the whole family to New Jersey and we spent two years there when I was a small boy. No, I didn't do much traveling with him other than that. He was back many other times, as I was, but we never went together. He went back for several months, in fact, when he went back. On commission he had painted and went back to install six or eight pictures on the steamship Haleakala when it was first launched, and then he made the trip around through the Panama Canal on her and back out here. He did exactly the same thing again for the Matson [Navigation] Company when the original Matsonia was launched on the East Coast. He painted and installed in the various lobbies and whatever it was--the lounges and whatever you call them on a ship--pictures. Went back to install them and then made the first voyage through the Panama Canal out here on those ships. That happened twice with two different ships. He originally was sent back to Paris to study by--who sent him? Some one of the old families.

M: Uh huh. Did his family support the fact of his being an artist?

H: Well, his father, having been a lawyer, wanted him to be a lawyer but he couldn't see the law profession and so he went on his own. Let's see. He went to Oberlin [College] and then came back here and whoever it was--I think it was

one of the Bishops; Bishop family--sent him back to Paris to study [at the Julianne Academy] where he was for three years, studying with Foureau and some Frenchmen here and there in Paris.

And 'course I was married [to Florence M. (Peggy) Campbell] and here all through the last World War [II]. I was practically too young for the first war and too old for the second war. I did start in in the first war [World War I] but I went into an officers' training camp and the war was over before I got out of there. I didn't see any action. Then we were here on December 7, 1941 and I was too old then. They didn't want me so I didn't get into the Second World War and I've never done any fighting for my country. (both chuckle) No, I just didn't make it either way. My brother did. He went into the Second World War and he was out on Okinawa and some of those places when there was action.

But, what now can I tell you?

M: I wanted to ask--how did your parents meet, do you know?

H: How did my parents meet?

M: Um hm. I gather your father went back to Paris before he was married. That was all before he got married?

H: Yes. 'Course that was way back in the 1800's. When did he get back from Paris, 1875? Somewhere along in there. [He attended Oahu College, now Punahou School, 1878-81.] I don't know how my parents met exactly. Oh, I do know after all. They both went to Punahou School and that was it, I think.

M: Uh huh, so they knew each other before your father . . .

H: Oh yes, when they were in high school. (apologizes for the condition of his apartment)

M: That's okay. No problem.

H: I didn't clean up all last week on account of this Eastern Star deal that I've been doing.

M: What do you collect in that chest full of drawers?

H: Old shells. That's part of my shell collection. I was for a time a conchologist, you might call him, and collected shells. And then, all through my boyhood, my father and my brother and I--my younger brother and I--used to upset my mother quite often because we would go out hiking on Sunday when we should be in church. We always held

church services. I mean, we'd stop up in the mountains and sit down and Dad would give us a little sermon. That was one way I learned a great deal about his beautifully philosophic outlook on life.

Our hikes would be primarily to hunt for land shells which are here on these islands and are indigenous and endemic to this one island in the whole world.

M: Uh huh. These are snails. Snail shells.

H: Snails, yes. They vary tremendously from ridge to ridge and valley to valley.

M: Where would you go, up above Honolulu? Is that where you went?

H: Yes, or the Koolau Mountains and the Waianae Mountains. Waianae Mountains have different kinds and they only grow above nine hundred feet and so they never did come down and cross between the Waianae Mountains and the Koolau Mountains to intermix, so there are two distinct varieties on the two ranges of mountains. But that was our hobby and I have some of what we collected in there. Mother didn't care much for it because our hikes always happened on Sunday. But, as I say, we always had our little religious service out in the hills.

M: You cut that out, then, after you were older too.

H: Oh yes. Well, I didn't have much time, being married.

M: Did you go to Punahou [School] too?

H: Yes, both my wife and I. That's where we met--Punahou. Then I went away to school.

M: Did you go to Punahou all the way through high school?

H: Yes. I went to some little private school somewhere up in Nuuanu Valley there called the Valley School through the sixth grade, and then I went to Punahou.

M: Did you live up near the [John Scott Boyd] Pratts?

H: Near the Pratts? Yes, right next door to their original place.

M: Yeh, I was just reading Mr. Pratt's book.

H: Yes, Scott's book isn't it?

M: Uh huh.

H: They lived right on the corner; my mother's place was right next door; and her sister was next door to her. The father had given the three daughters these three pieces of land there. So all the pieces of land belonged to Mrs. Pratt, Mrs. Hitchcock, and Mrs. Sherman. Nott, she was then--Mrs. Sherman. Sarah, Hester, and Laura--three sisters.

[Sarah Catharine Dickson married Dr. John S.B. Pratt; Hester Judd Dickson married David Howard Hitchcock, II; and Laura Fish Dickson married Dr. Frederick J. Nott, then George Sherman.]

Our place is where St. Mark's Church is right there next to the corner on Judd Street. [St. Luke's Episcopal Church is at 45 North Judd Street.]

M: Oh yes, I know where.

H: They bought our place and built their church. And the old place that was on the corner was torn down and there's nothing but apartment buildings in there now. I think the old place next door, the third place, is still there.

M: Did your father have his studio in the house where he painted?

H: Well, (coughs) as long as I can remember, his studio was somewhere else. He had a studio in what was (chuckles) Letting-Out-Care, he used to call it, where the YWCA building is downtown there now.

M: On Richards Street?

H: Yes. And before that he had a studio upstairs on the corner of Fort and Hotel streets. Then he was upstairs in the old building--it's no longer there I guess; the stairs going up went up right about where the downtown Liberty House entrance is on King Street. He had a little office on the third floor there. Then for many years he had a studio on Kalakaua Avenue. I can't think of the street that comes in there. It was just below King Street. On Kalakaua Avenue there is a small business block on the left as you go toward Waikiki. It was in that block someplace.

M: Before Kapiolani [Boulevard].

H: Oh yes, yes, about halfway between King and Kapiolani. There was an old home in there originally, I guess. He rented his studio from an old Japanese dry cleaner and he

had a big studio there and it was well known.

M: Did people go to him for portraits as well as the . . .

H: Hmm?

M: Did he do commissioned portraits?

H: No. He painted one or two but he wasn't a portrait artist. Entirely landscape and seascape.

M: Um hm.

H: He did one or two. He did a portrait of old man Dodge of the Dodge family here who I remember. He was a hunchback and we still have the sketch of that portrait. And he did these two here of himself and my mother. (clock chimes) He did a few now and then. Of course, when he was in Paris he did a great deal of figure study so that he could, if he wanted to, paint portraits but he didn't care for it. He liked to be out in the open, which I do myself.

M: Did he make a fairly good income from it?

H: Well, most artists, except Picasso, were poor during their lives and it was only after they went on that their works amounted to anything. Yes, he made a fairly good living. As a matter of fact, as I was telling you, in 1903 or 1904 he made so much that he decided to take this trip with the whole family to the East. My mother and brother and I were the family then. They took us off for two years back on the East Coast.

M: How old were you then?

H: I was four--three to five, I think. My brother was just a small boy.

M: You just had that one brother.

H: One brother and one sister. My brother is two years younger than I am; my sister is seven years younger than I am.

M: Did you take an interest in your father's work as a child?

H: Oh yes. Almost every summer we'd go out on camping trips with him. 'Course his primary object was to get out into new country and paint and I spent a great deal of time with him. Then I used to go down later to his studio and sit there and watch him. I think some of it rubbed off on me

because I'm able to do some myself.

M: Uh huh. Did he encourage you to go into art seriously?

H: No. From a youngster, I had engineering in view and my parents didn't want to discourage it. If that's what I wanted, that was what I should do. So they sent me to Cornell. I was in the class of 1917 at Punahou and the class of 1921 at Cornell. That was some years ago.

M: Um hm. (chuckles) After you got out of Cornell [University], did you come straight back to live here?

H: Well, I took my third year of school here at the University of Hawaii which was then only three buildings on the campus it's now on. There was old Hawaii Hall and the engineering laboratory, the College of Agriculture. Oh, there were four buildings. There was a physics lab. The physics building was a wood-frame building. That was all the buildings there were on the tremendous campus they have now at the university.

Then I went back to finish at Cornell for my fourth year. That year my mother died and I came back here and settled here. I went to work for what was then the Hawaiian Dredging Company and the Hawaiian Contracting Company, which was the beginning of the Dillingham Corporation.

M: What kind of engineering?

H: Civil. [He was with the Hawaiian Dredging Company from 1922 to 1964; as timekeeper in 1922, construction accountant, 1923-48, and chief cost engineer, 1948-64.]

END OF SIDE 1/1ST TAPE

I'm rambling on here and saying little.

M: No, no, no. You're doing fine.

H: Some people talk a lot and say little. Maybe I'm doing that.

M: No. No. How old was your mother when she passed away?

H: She was fifty-six, I think, if I remember right. She died of cancer. We were living then in the old place on Judd Street, of course. She left the old place to my sister. Just after we were married, I bought a piece of the old Wilder homestead on Judd Street and built our home where we lived for forty years until we came over here. My wife has Parkinson's [disease], which is what brought us over

here [to Pohai Nani], because I found that this little hospital we have here was just right for her and so we put her there--my daughter and I. And then my daughter and I didn't want to stay at home anymore so I sold and came over to live in this one-room apartment high above the ground which I swore I'd never do and here I am, mainly to be near her. And so, I don't have room for all I want to do; consequently, this is the mare's-nest I have to clean up every once in awhile and straighten out. (Lynda chuckles) I bring her up here every now and then in a wheel chair and she says, "You've got to get at it. You've got to get at it and clean it up." And so I do; I clean up and put away and so forth. I guess I have enough of my father's easy-going attitude to let it go until next time. (chuckles)

M: When did you get married?

H: In 1922 [February 25, 1922].

M: Oh, just shortly after you got out of school.

H: Yes. Of course we had been engaged. As a matter of fact, we became engaged when I was down here at the university in my third year in college. I had met my wife in high school, of course, and so we had gone on corresponding. She was a Hilo girl and her family held a party, ostensibly for me when I was visiting up there in Hilo, but the party was a surprise announcement of our engagement. When they made the announcement that I was engaged to the belle of Hilo, or the belle of Hilo was engaged to me, five or six of the young men at the party got up and walked out. (laughter) Here was an outsider who had come in and stolen away. . . . She was--I mean, you might call her--the belle of Hilo. She was well-liked and the Hilo boys and young blades from the Scotch Coast down there were put out. (laughter)

Then I went back to school and when I came back my mother died and we were married and we lived there for a year, and then I bought and built my own place.

M: You mean you lived with your father.

H: Yes, for about a year; almost two years. Then we bought a piece of this old Wilder homestead on the same street and I built down there, where we lived for forty years. And my daughter was born there actually and married there.

M: Did your father continue in the house by himself?

H: No. In order to be able to build on the same lot where I

bought--it was only 16,000 square feet--I had to build, or I was about to build, a servant's quarters and so we made it a little fancier than we would have otherwise and he lived there for the rest of his life. He died in 1943.

M: Did he continue painting?

H: Well, not during his last years. He had a stroke along in there, near his last year. No, he didn't do much painting after that. We still kept his studio down there on Kalakaua Avenue--my brother and sister and I--but he didn't go down very much because he had to be taken down after his stroke. He spent most of his time at home there and he had a vegetable garden in the backyard.

He was there during the first couple of years of the war. That was before Punchbowl [National Cemetery of the Pacific] or any other cemetery was started. (clock chimes) They buried a lot of the killed right there in Nuuanu Cemetery and he used to go out through the back hedge there and attended about every one of their services when they would bring in three or four coffins to bury there. But I think very likely it was a little too much for him. I remember him looking up to the sky there and he said, "To think that such a thing could come out of my Hawaiian skies." It was hard for him to really understand the whole thing. He was eighty-three years old then.

M: Yeh. He was going to school in 1875.

H: He was born in 1861. He remembered his father walking the beach at Hilo--he was a Hilo boy, too; he'd been born in Hilo--crying. The only time he saw his father cry was when the news of [President Abraham] Abe Lincoln's death was brought here, of course by sailors then. He remembered that, although at the time I guess he was only four years old or something like that.

M: Um hm. Did you ever hear your father talk about his feelings towards annexation? Did he ever have opinions about it?

H: Well, I guess he was for it because he fought in the revolution here--the aborted revolution [against the republic in January 1895]--as a member of the Citizens' Guard which was anti-monarchy, so I guess he was for annexation because that's what they were fighting for.

As a matter of fact, my forebear on the other side, [Dr. Gerrit Parmele] Judd, was one of those who way back in the old days advocated that sort of thing. In fact, there was a long tale about writing the epistle to the United States to take over the country here down in the

tomb. You know that story, don't you?

M: Yes, I just read that book a while ago.

H: Uh huh. Well, I think many of them were for annexation and, as my father did, even fought against the monarchy. (chuckles) He tells the story of his service, though, in this military organization they had that they called the Citizens' Guard--that his tour of duty consisted of spending most of his time in a sand cave out there at Makapuu Point, guarding the pass so there couldn't be any communication around there. (chuckles) He said they spent most of their time sitting in this sand cave there keeping the sand crabs away from nibbling at their feet. (laughter) That was his military duty so he didn't see any actual fighting at all in that revolution.

But his father was a surveyor. He was a lawyer and an engineer and he made most of the original surveys on the Island of Hawaii. That's my father's father [David Howard Hitchcock]. And my father used to, coming down to Punahou and then going back to Hilo for the summers and other vacations, spend most of his summers out hunting. There were wild cattle and pigs and so forth all over the Island of Hawaii and he kept his father's survey gangs, which would consist of forty men or so in the survey crew, supplied with meat from all these cattle and pigs. That was his summer duty, as it were, for two or three years and he had lots of stories to tell of those and he used to tell them to us kids. They usually had to do with hunting wild cattle and his narrow escapes and so forth and we always called them bull stories. "Dad, tell us a bull story." (laughter)

M: Your grandparents on your mother's side, did you know them?

H: My grandparents?

M: On your mother's side, the Dicksons.

H: No. No, I didn't know any of my grandparents. They were all passed on. The only one of my grandparents who saw me at all, I think, was my father's father. They took me up there [to Hilo] as a baby for him to see. I was the first of his progeny. They took me up to Hilo to see him and I, of course, was a babe in arms and too small to remember him, so I never knew any of my grandparents. My mother and father were married rather late. I think he was in his thirties and she was around thirty, so I didn't know my grandparents. My brother at present is in California. So is my sister.

M: Did either of them become artists?

H: My sister did. She was a good landscapist, a good painter of nature, and painted flower arrangements and things like that beautifully. And then to my mind, as I put it, she went haywire. She went into this modernism which I don't go for at all. She has had, though, two or three shows there in San Francisco and Oakland of her work; has had her modernism--impressionism is what she's doing--accepted in several juried shows. I think the worse it is the more chance you have of acceptance in some of these modernistic shows.

M: (chuckling) It seems that way at times.

H: They don't care much for my type of thing anymore, although I've been accepted here and there. Of course I've had my own shows and people like them enough; they want them.

M: Then you stayed with Dillingham after you went there.

H: Yes.

M: So your painting was a hobby.

H: Um hm. I stayed there and I didn't start painting until after I'd left, after I retired.

M: Oh, I see.

H: With my father, the artist that he was, it was the question of the master and the tyro. I couldn't paint like he could and so I didn't try. Then I found later that when I did try, I did pretty well. These are things from my last show that I haven't delivered yet.

M: Hmm, nice.

H: They're about to be delivered.

M: I like that. That looks familiar. Where is that?

H: That? That's Makua.

M: Oh yeh.

H: Right beyond Makaha.

M: Yeh, we camped at Kea'au several times. It's our favorite place.

- H: Um hm. That's looking back toward Makaha and that's Makua Beach there. See all the kiawe. The old cave is over in that first ridge coming down there. (clock chimes) So I do a little of that sort of thing myself.
- M: Um hm. That's real nice.
- H: I call this one "A Gray Day" here.
- M: A what?
- H: Gray Day. Gray day, (both chuckle) which is what it is. It's not bright sunshine. I have yet to deliver those. I've been expecting the people that bought them to come and get them but I'll take them out to them, I guess.
- M: How much do you get for a painting like that, if I may ask?
- H: That was two hundred [dollars]. That was a hundred and twenty-five. My dad's of those sizes would bring pretty near ten times as much now. (chuckles)
- M: Who collected his paintings?
- H: Hmm?
- M: Did anyone locally really collect his paintings?
- H: Oh yes, there're several collectors here. And I've been restoring quite a few and many of them have gone to local collectors. I don't know the names. We've been selling through a middleman. Donald Angus had quite a collection of them.
- M: Who?
- H: Angus. Donald Angus.
- M: Where did all those objects come from? Those objects up there, are those things that you collected?
- H: Yes, um hm. Those are a few . . . (counter at 373)

END OF INTERVIEW

Re-transcribed and edited by Katherine B. Allen

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THE WATUMULL FOUNDATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

In May 1971, the Watumull Foundation initiated an Oral History Project.

The project was formally begun on June 24, 1971 when Katherine B. Allen was selected to interview kamaainas and longtime residents of Hawaii in order to preserve their experiences and knowledge. In July, Lynda Mair joined the staff as an interviewer.

During the next seventeen months, eighty-eight persons were interviewed. Most of these taped oral histories were transcribed by November 30, 1972.

Then the project was suspended indefinitely due to the retirement of the foundation's chairman, Ellen Jensen Watumull.

In February 1979, the project was reactivated and Miss Allen was recalled as director and editor.

Three sets of the final transcripts, typed on acid-free Permalife Bond paper, have been deposited respectively in the Archives of Hawaii, the Hamilton Library at the University of Hawaii, and the Cooke Library at Punahou School.